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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: NORTHERN OPPOSITION LEADERS TELL SPECIAL ENVOY
GRATION THAT DEMONSTRATIONS WERE NECESSARY

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1370
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1404

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: On December 16, five northern opposition political party leaders discussed the recent demonstrations in Khartoum and their objectives with U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan (SE) General Scott Gration. Mariam Al-Sadig Al-Mahdi from the Umma Party, Ali Traio of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minawi (SLM/MM), Taj El-Sir Mohamed Salih of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Siddiq Hassan Al-Turabi from the Popular Congress Party (PCP), and Siddiq Yousif of the Communist Party, all agreed that they wanted free and fair national elections in April 2010. Four of the parties had been working together (with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and other parties) to stage the demonstrations of December 7 and 14, while the DUP disagreed about the utility of using demonstrations to bring about change. Instead, the DUP's Salih said his party preferred holding meetings with all parties to reach consensus on differences. Many in the group expressed concerns about what they claimed were irregularities in the voter registration process, but agreed that in general, the results of the latter had been encouraging. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Mariam Al-Sadig Al-Mahdi from the Umma Party recounted for SE Gration the most recent opposition demonstration on December 14, organized by the parties of the Juba Alliance, during which Government of Sudan (GOS) police arrested and detained her for several hours. She called it a silent gathering rather than a demonstration, and said the force used by the GOS was not warranted. She stated that Sudan does not have a "Government of National Unity" (GNU), instead accusing the National Congress Party (NCP) of preventing forward movement on issues of national importance. Referring to the NCP and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) agreement on three long-disputed bills, Al-Sadig argued that the demonstrations of December 7 and 14 prompted resolution of differences between those parties that had not been possible for years. She said this gave renewed faith to political parties and activists that there was hope for the political process, even if it required the intense pressure of public protests to bring about progress. When pressed for a specific objective for the demonstrations, she characterized them as a mobilization of the people in which they exercised their rights, in order to begin the long-term democratic transformation process in Sudan.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ali Traio from the SLM/MM, went further in his justification of the demonstrations. He said they had been intended to rectify election malpractices and highlight the issue of election-related issues in Darfur. He, too, viewed public pressure on the NCP as being responsible for agreement on the three contested bills. However, he noted that the National Security Act bill and issues relating to elections in Darfur remained unresolved.

¶4. (SBU) Siddiq Yousif from the Communist Party said his party was interested in free, fair and transparent elections. Although acknowledging that according to statistics, some 60 percent of Darfuris had registered to vote, he maintained that this number was not accurate and reflected voter registration irregularities. Yousif claimed that in some areas, especially certain locations where the NCP might not have been confident of a winning vote, the registration data had been manipulated. He cited one location in Khartoum in the area surrounding President Omar Al-Bashir's residence and said that according to census data, the population is 934 people; however, according to voter registration data, over 2,000 people registered to vote in this locale. Yousif agreed that not all areas might not have the same high number of alleged voter registration irregularities, but emphasized that irregularities were common and politically -motivated.

¶5. (SBU) Taj El-Sir Mohamed Salih of the DUP noted that his party was not part of the Juba Alliance and had not participated in the recent demonstrations. He said that while the DUP was not necessarily against the demonstrations, the party did not believe such actions were the best or only way to effect change. The DUP preferred, he said, a meeting or conference between the opposition parties and the GNU to discuss and resolve differences. His party had sent letters to both GOS President Bashir and GOSS President Salva Kiir calling on them to initiate such a consensus-building conference. The DUP's hope, he concluded, was that such a gathering would take place prior to national elections.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: With the exception of the DUP, the

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opposition party representatives were united in the view that public protests and demonstrations are necessary to achieve progress on election and referendum issues. Despite arrests and reported beatings, those favoring such demonstrations did not seem daunted by the GOS response. They vowed to continue with more rallies and demonstrations in the coming weeks. All continued to support preparations for elections to be held on schedule in April 2010. End Comment.

¶7. (U) S/USSES has cleared this message.
ASQUINO